What if There is a Storm?

Digging will happen from north to south so if there is a storm strong enough to exceed the pumps' ability to pump the river water, river flows would move from clean to contaminated areas (cleaned areas would not get recontaminated). Also, the berms have been designed so they will not add to any flooding of surrounding areas. If necessary, channel openings within the berms can be opened to allow the natural movement of flood water, and the berm heights are low enough that in extreme flood conditions water will simply flow over.

Re-planting and Shoreline Restoration

Once sampling confirms that the contaminated sediment and soils have been removed, the river banks and staging areas will be replanted with native trees and wetland grasses and shrubs.

EPA is working in partnership with the Harbor Trustee Council and the City of New Bedford to enhance this restoration effort by creating about a one acre salt marsh at the former lumberyard area. This proposed salt marsh will be part of the City's overall park design for the former lumberyard. The Town of Acushnet's recently completed River View park is directly across the Acushnet River.

What Should Area Residents Expect?

- Work will generally take place Monday through Friday from 7 am to 5 pm, with work on Saturdays as needed.
- Workers will be wearing protective clothing to prevent their skin and clothing from touching PCB-contaminated material.
- Preparation activities, like installing temporary chain-link fences, electricity and building the staging areas and earthern berms, will start in October 2002.
- The actual digging and removal work will start in November 2002 after the fish run ends and will go into February 2003.
- Some existing trees and plants will have to be cleared to allow contamination removal. However, they will be replaced with higher quality, native trees and plants during the final restoration process in spring 2003 (it will take time for the new plantings to reach their full height).
- Approximately 30 to 40 trucks per day to Sawyer Street will be needed.
- Trucks will be entering and exiting from the staging areas (the former lumberyard in New Bedford and Titleist's shoreline parking lot in Acushnet) and from the corner of Wood Street and River Road in New Bedford. From the lumberyard staging area, the trucks will go south on River Road, west on Wood Street, south on Belleville Avenue and east on Sawyer Street to EPA's shoreline holding facilities.

Site History

The New Bedford Harbor Superfund Site is an 18,000 acre urban estuary reaching from the upper Acushnet River into Buzzards Bay. Its sediment is highly contaminated with PCBs and heavy metals. The New Bedford Harbor Superfund cleanup plan calls for the dredging, dewatering and disposal of PCB-contaminated sediment at an offsite licensed landfill and in three shoreline confined disposal facilities. Around 500,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediments will be dredged - roughly 75 football fields filled 3 feet deep each. Construction of the waterfront bulkheads for the dewatering facility is underway and dredging of the harbor is scheduled to begin in Spring 2004.

For More Information Contact:

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Harbor Cleanup News

New Bedford Harbor Superfund Site ~ October 2002

Early Cleanup Work Begins

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) To Remove Contaminated Sediment This Fall From Acushnet River North of Wood / Slocum Street

Why Clean Up This Area Now?

While eating PCB-contaminated seafood is the most significant health risk posed by the New Bedford Harbor Superfund site, skin contact with PCB-contaminated shoreline sediment also presents unacceptable health risks - especially in areas where public access to the river is likely. Sampling performed since 1999 identified the river reach north of the Wood/Slocum Street bridge as highly contaminated with PCBs. Since shoreline residences and local parks are in this area, EPA installed fencing and did a limited cleanup in 2000 and 2001. The remainder of the contaminated sediment will be removed this fall.

This cleanup will also allow the City of New Bedford to speed-up the development of River View Park at the site of a former shoreline lumberyard.

Acushnet River North of Wood / Slocum Street

What Are PCBs?

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are man-made, odorless, and colorless chemicals that were used in New Bedford in the manufacturing of electrical transformers and capacitors. The health effects from PCBs may include liver and immune system damage; neurological, developmental, and reproductive effects; and cancer. Due to the health risks from eating fish, shellfish, and lobster from certain areas of New Bedford Harbor and the Acushnet River Estuary, the MA Department of Public Health has restricted fishing and lobstering in these areas since 1979.

How Contaminated Is The Area's Sediment?

PCB levels are highly variable throughout the harbor Superfund site, including this northern-most area. Levels as high as 30,000 to 40,000 parts per million have been detected in wetland and mudflat areas north of Wood Street. These levels are thousands of times higher than the site's PCB cleanup goals. Although other areas of the harbor have similar if not quite as high levels of PCB contamination, this northern stretch is of concern due to the residential and recreational land use along the shore.

How Much Will Be Removed And From Where?

Around 12,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment covering about 6.5 acres of river bottom and shoreline will be removed. Most of this material will come from the river area north of the Wood/Slocum Street bridge continuing up to just south of the Main Street bridge. In addition, the cleanup will include the removal of contaminated sediment within 250 feet south of the Wood/Slocum Street bridge.

How Is The Contaminated Sediment Going To Be Removed From The River?

Most of the work is going to be done in near-dry conditions by temporarily preventing river or harbor water

from entering the work area. The incoming tidal water from the harbor will be blocked by an earthen berm 250 feet south of the Wood/ Slocum Street bridge, and the fresh river water from the north will be blocked by an earthen berm 550 feet south of the Main Street bridge. During the cleanup, this river flow will be pumped around the work area to allow the needed near-dry conditions. By digging in November 2002 through February 2003 the project will not interfere with the spring and fall fish runs.

Excavating equipment will dig the sediment and place it in leak-proof containers which will then be trucked to EPA's Sawyer Street facility in New Bedford. Once EPA's sediment dewatering and transfer facility at the north terminal is working, this project's sediment will be sent to it for final processing. Wetland sediment with plant and root systems intact will be trucked directly off-site for disposal. All trucks will be cleaned and decontaminated before leaving the site and entering onto public roads.

Temporary staging areas will be set-up at the former lumberyard in New Bedford and on Titleist's shoreline parking lot in Acushnet. The decontamination of the sediment transport trucks will happen at these areas and the pumping network to bypass the fresh water river flow around the work area will be located at the former lumberyard. These areas also will temporarily house work trailers, heavy equipment, other cleanup supplies, and the truck decontamination wash water which will later be treated at Sawyer Street.

Will Air Quality be Monitored to Ensure the Safety of Surrounding Neighborhoods?

Yes, as has been done in all previous work of this type, the air will be monitored at different locations around the work area, and the results will be made available to the public. Based on experience under similar conditions, airborne PCB emissions aren't expected to be a problem. If elevated levels are detected, corrective action will be taken to make sure the project is not impacting surrounding residents or workers.

How Do We Know if the Cleanup is Successful?

Once the contaminated material is removed, the remaining sediment or shoreline soils will be tested to make sure PCB levels are below the cleanup goals. For the harbor cleanup, four different PCB cleanup goals have been set depending on land use and habitat. For example, shoreline areas next to residences will be cleaned using a 1 part per million (ppm) cleanup goal while shoreline areas in public parks will be cleaned using a 25 ppm cleanup goal. Wetland areas where public access is not expected will have a 50 ppm cleanup goal, while subtidal areas and mudflats will have a 10 ppm goal.